

Are the Farmers and Workers the Victors in Minnesota?

By JOHN PREPTE

Magnus Johnson, the candidate of the Farmer-Labor Party, was elected in Minnesota, with 54,000 votes against Governor Preus and was the official candidate of the Republican Party and the Harding administration.

It is a tremendous defeat for the Republican Party, the party in power. It is a tremendous defeat for the entire Harding Administration. This side of the problem is clear to everybody. But the problem has another side to it. The Farmer-Labor Party candidate has been elected. The victory is won. But we must bring up most emphatically the question: are the farmers and workers the real victors in Minnesota?

We answer the question immediately.

First of all, there is no doubt that the powerful Republican Party of the most powerful capitalists and the mightiest capitalist government of the world, has received a slap in the face which could be heard throughout the United States.

Second, it is clear that the masses of the farmers and workers made up the forces which have defeated the government.

Third, it is nevertheless just as true that the real victors on the political battlefield of Minnesota were not the masses of exploited farmers and workers, but the confused, half-baked politicians of the lower middle class and of the well-to-do farmers.

A short analysis of the Minnesota elections will provide ample proof of this statement.

Class Divisions and Conflicts in Minnesota

The election campaign of Minnesota was carried on under the name of the Farmer-Labor Party. But in reality, the Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota is not the party of the workers and exploited farmers. The Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota is not a part of any national organization. It is only a state party. It was never affiliated with the old Farmer-Labor Party that died pub-

ly at the July 3rd Convention in Chicago, and it pretends that it had nothing to do with the new Farmer-Labor Party that was born at the July 3rd Convention of Chicago. The Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota is a bloc of two organizations—the Nonpartisan League of Farmers and the Nonpartisan League of Workers. Minnesota does not belong to the industrial centers of the United States, so that the workers in this alliance play second fiddle to the farmers. The political victory in Minnesota does not depend on big cities and big factories, but on the tens of thousands living in isolated farms, small towns and villages. Furthermore, the masses in the only big centers, the twin cities St. Paul-Minneapolis, unlike Chicago or Pittsburgh, are dominated by a lower middle class psychology, rather than by a proletarian psychology. The Democratic illusion, the absolute belief in the cure-all patent medicine of democracy is still unbroken in Minnesota. The class-conflicts had not developed sharply up to recently in Minnesota.

The after-war period has brought about a great change. The gigantic economic crisis of 1920 means the turning point. The overwhelming power of the trusts, railroads and banks had driven all classes into rebellion against the capitalists. The workers revolted at first against unemployment, then against the Daugherty injunction (the railroad workers are especially strong in Minnesota). The wheat-growing farmers were driven at first into despair and then into revolt by the growing prices of industrial products, the rising freight rates, by mortgage and tenancy, and by falling wheat prices. The small business men who had for a long time suffered from the trusts, were driven into rebellion because the bankruptcy of the farmers meant the bankruptcy of their customers. And finally, even the small-town bankers and small manufacturers joined the camp of discontented elements because the pressure upon them of the great trusts and finance

capital of Chicago and New York became more unbearable from day to day.

Not a Class-Movement, but a Workers' Revolt

The play which has been enacted before our eyes in Minnesota proves to be a very interesting spectacle. It is not only the movement of exploited farmers and workers, but it is a general, all-inclusive movement against a handful of capitalists and trust magnates of all classes of society—the worker and small manufacturer, the consumer and small business man, the poor tenant farmer, as well as the well-to-do farmer, make up this movement. It is a real people's movement against capitalism. It is not a movement of one class against another, but of a number of classes against finance capital.

The Minnesota upheaval is a general people's movement. That is its strong side, and also its weak side. It is its strong side because that is the very reason that it could win so quickly against the powerful Republican Party, and the still more powerful government. But it is its weak side because, not being a real class movement, it is dominated by the ideology of a narrow-minded lower middle class and its program is a mixture of say-nothing commonplaces and quack remedies. It is self-evident that Magnus Johnson was the suitable candidate for this movement—this farmer politician with a strong voice and well political outlook. He has declared that his program is: a bloc of workers, farmers and legitimate business against trusts, railroad companies, and big banks. He declared further that in the question of internal politics he will follow La Follette, and in questions of foreign policy he will follow Brookhart.

Classes and Political Parties

And Magnus Johnson has performed the miracle of uniting on July 15 the masses of workers, small business men and farmers against the capitalists. The alliance of work-

ers, farmers and legitimate business was so powerful that it broke thru all old party lines. Senator La Follette, the radical Republican, supported Johnson as much as did Senator Wickersham, the radical Demo-

ocrat, and even the moderate, Governor Preus was beaten, not only

by all conservative Republicans and by the Harding administration, but quite openly by all conservative Democrats. The class-situation is truly mirrored in the political situation in this way. First, the Democratic Party has disappeared entirely. Its candidate received only a few thousand votes. The radical Democrats voted for Johnson, the conservative Democrats for Preus. The Republican Party was also split. Its lower middle class adherents organized the Progressive Republican League and agitated for Johnson.

The most remarkable thing in the elections was that Governor Preus and his campaign workers did not support with a single word President Harding and his administration, that the local Republican leaders directly begged Harding for God's sake not to support them. Not a single national figure of the Republican Party dared to speak during the entire election campaign in Minnesota. The campaign workers of Preus were either silent on the political issues of the government, or spoke against them. Governor Preus did not choose to mention the World Court and he had to speak against the high tariff of the Republicans. The Republican Harding administration was at first defeated by the Republican Party of Minnesota before it was defeated by the masses of Minnesota, thru the defeat of the Republicans of Minnesota.

Farmer-Labor Party, But Not a Party of Farmers and Workers

We repeat, the defeat of the Republican Harding administration is complete. The Minnesota Republicans could only enter into the battle by not identifying themselves openly with the Republican Party on a national scale. Magnus Johnson won by the politicians of the Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota who represent only the interests of the small business men and well-to-do farmers.

The Workers Party and the Minnesota Elections

The Workers Party supported

Party, but also workers who won by an alliance between workers, farmers, and legitimate business interests. They instructed their members to vote for him. Why? Have we perhaps shared the illusions of the laboring masses of Minnesota as regards the real character of the so-called Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota? Did the Central Executive of the Workers Party not know one day before the elections, that which we now write about it, one day after the elections? Of course, we had no illusions as to the lower middle class character of the Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota, and the shilly-shally program of Magnus Johnson and Shipstead. But in spite of all that, and consciously, we gave the instructions to our party members to vote for the Farmer-Labor Party ticket. Why? What were our motives?

We had two deciding motives. First, the whole working class and the whole mass of exploited farmers in Minnesota had arisen as one man for Magnus Johnson and for the so-called Farmer-Labor Party. And not only in Minnesota, but in the whole of the United States, this election was considered as the cause of the working class. Not only the official American Federation of Labor, the Railway Brotherhoods and the Socialist Party, but the whole rank and file of the trade union movement had endorsed Johnson.

Second, the masses felt with rare clarity that the enemy who must be defeated in these elections is capital and the capitalist government.

The Workers Party could not stay away from a fight in which the whole working class participated, even if these masses had lower middle class illusions, and even if they stood under petty bourgeois leadership. And the Workers Party could stay away still less from a fight where the struggle was clearly directed against the capitalist government.

The Farmer-Labor ticket won. The workers and poor farmers think that they have won. Now begins the important task for the Workers Party. The members of the Workers Party in Minnesota must go to the workers and exploited farmers and tell them that we have voted for Magnus Johnson because he was candidate of the laboring masses. And we have voted for him because we wanted to strike a powerful blow upon the head of the Harding government. But Magnus Johnson is not the man of the workers and exploited farmers. He will never represent the interests of the laboring masses and with his program it is impossible to help the workers and exploited farmers. It was right to vote against the Republicans and Democrats because these two parties are dominated by the interest of big business. But the so-called Farmer-Labor Party in Minnesota is also a party of workers and exploited farmers. It was dominated by the interests of small business. We must call upon the trade unions and farmer organizations to join the new Federated Farmer-Labor Party which is really a class-party of workers and exploited farmers.

The Communists must understand that the Minnesota elections are of very great national importance. First the elections show that in spite of the so-called prosperity, the dissatisfaction of the farmers and workers is continually growing. Second, the show that the old parties are in disintegration. Third, the "people's movement" of third party against capitalist parties is growing in significance. Fourth, and most important, we must set up against the wretched people's movement of third party, the class-party of workers and exploited farmers—the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. The development in the immediate future will go much more quickly than in the past. Years were needed before the workers and farmers became convinced that the Republicans and Democrats did not wish to help them. Money will suffice to show them that La Follette and Johnson cannot help them. They know today that Harding is their enemy. Experience will show them that La Follette and Johnson are not their friends.